DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
JACKSONVILLE DISTRICT CORPS OF ENGINEERS
P.O. BOX 4970
JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA 32232-0019

REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF

October 4, 2006

As the commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District, I know many people are interested in the Herbert Hoover Dike (HHD). I am writing to update you on the latest developments regarding our work to strengthen the HHD. An Independent Technical Review panel has just completed an evaluation of our project design. We are now ready to move forward with a new approach based on this additional professional advice, including lessons learned from Hurricane Katrina.

First, let me provide some background. In the late 1990s, Jacksonville District published reports that showed certain areas of vulnerability in the HHD. By 2000, we had received Congressional approval to proceed with the design of a project to rehabilitate, or reinforce, the HHD. Construction of the first of eight sections of this project began in December 2005.

Recent input we received from a variety of expert sources, including lessons learned from Hurricane Katrina, brought Jacksonville District to convene an Independent Technical Review (ITR) panel to further evaluate the design of the rehabilitation project. Our existing design was developed well before Hurricane Katrina's devastating impact on the hurricane protection levees in New Orleans. We believed that before moving forward, we should apply the lessons learned in Katrina's aftermath to ensure that the HHD would continue to protect lakeside communities, as it has for more than 70 years.

The ITR panel included Corps experts from across the nation, as well as participants from the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD). This group evaluated the HHD rehabilitation project design for the first section of the project, Reach 1A, to determine if it was in keeping with applicable criteria, regulations and professional standards and practices.

After the ITR review, a second level of evaluation was conducted. In early September, the District hosted a meeting of about 40 experts, to review the ITR findings and to discuss future actions for strengthening the HHD. Participants included the ITR panel and additional scientists and engineers from the SFWMD, URS (a global engineering design firm), BCI (authors of the state-sponsored report released in May) and the Corps.

The new design concept agreed upon by this group includes a seepage berm for decreasing piping and a cut off wall for increasing stability. The design approach will also incorporate additional protection features, where needed. Looking to the future, it is important that this design allows for upgrading, if and when we determine that to be necessary.

It is important to note that the newly-adopted design approach closely mirrors an alternative that was developed by the Corps in 2000, but not chosen by the state and federal partners because it required additional and costly acquisition of real estate and may have impacted regional groundwater. That decision was based on the team's knowledge and best professional judgment at that time. Now, in this post-Katrina environment, factors that previously shaped our designs and constrained our decisions have been put aside by the Corps and our partners. The project we initiated did meet the objectives identified in the studies of the 1990s. The new design solution has been adopted as we have cast aside significant constraints. The new project focuses solely on public safety and risk reduction goals.

So where does this put us today? We're currently working to expedite the redesign and resume construction on reinforcement of Reach 1A. With safety as our highest priority, we will then initiate design and construction in other areas, beginning with those that are most in need of repair and located on property that we currently own.

Catastrophic natural disasters bring quick and dramatic changes, particularly in the way we define project goals and evaluate project performance. The Corps will always remain committed to meeting the needs of the public by developing the very best engineering solutions to control Lake Okeechobee water levels and to enhance the effectiveness and safety of the dike. With the state, other federal agencies and the public as our partners, we can and will develop effective solutions that will support a sustainable south Florida.

Sincerely,

/s/

Paul L. Grosskruger
Colonel, U.S. Army
District Commander